The Struggle for Via Bologna Street Market: Crisis, Racial Denial and Speaking Back to Power in Naples Italy

Abstract:

This paper is based on ethnographic research conducted with migrant and Italian street vendors in Naples, Southern Italy, in 2012. It tells the story of Via Bologna market which was nearly closed down by City Hall in this period. Naples is a city where issues of poverty and unemployment predate and have been exacerbated by manifold narratives of crisis now unfolding across Europe regarding the economy, political legitimacy, security and migration. Street markets have always been an important and visible economic survival strategy for both Neapolitans and migrants there. This article shows how the Via Bologna street vendors appropriated and adapted discourses about crisis to form their own cosmopolitan social movement that halted the closure of the market. It argues that, in the age of globalised migration, the multilingual nature of such collective action is central to understanding social struggles that must be organized between marginalised groups of people divided by race, religion, politics and legal status. This, frequently ambiguous, transcultural solidarity speaks back against a mainstream post-racial discourse – often articulated by the Neapolitan street vendors at the market – that would reduce the complexity of such collective action to questions of poverty and class struggle.

Keywords: collective action; migration; multilingualism; post-race; urban multiculture

Introduction

In recent times, public debates about crisis have shifted away from a focus on the economic to describe crisis as something emerging in political institutions, geopolitical violence, the rise of the political Right, and migration. Sociologists have argued for the need to challenge the construction of such 'metanarratives' of crisis in order to critique the problematic disjuncture this creates between economy and society as unrelated spheres of life (Dinerstein et al. 2014: 859-61), and differentiate rhetoric about crisis from the risk of catastrophic events that might be avoided (Beck 2013: 69-72). This paper responds to these voices by paying particular attention to how migrant and Neapolitan street vendors are collaborating with each other in the context of multiple dimensions of crisis in Naples, Southern Italy.

Naples can be described as a city where narratives about crisis pre-date and are exacerbated by the current geo-political situation. Street vending has always been a solution for unemployed Neapolitans and, significantly, migrants have also been able to insert themselves into this sector to work with and alongside locals.[i] As such, street markets have become important and visible sites of transcultural encounter and collaboration, despite the differential rights, legal statuses and life possibilities of migrants and those with Italian nationality. At the same time, over the last three decades Neapolitan street markets have been reconfigured in public discourse as emblematic of urban decay and an impediment to security and the tourist industry. Migrant vendors, whether documented or undocumented, and working with or without vendor licenses, have been targeted as key problem-makers (Dines 2012: 185-194). The markets around Piazza Garibaldi, a square in front of the city's main railway station that was the main field site for this ethnography, have

been subjected to repeated crackdowns, closures and struggles to re-open them that have involved street vendors working together with the city's anti-racist movement to approach and appeal to the administration. In 2012 a group of Neapolitan vendors found themselves in the same position as a group of migrant vendors when they had their market license removed and their livelihoods halted. The African-run market on Via Bologna market became a multi-ethnic market space as the vendors worked together to defend their jobs. The transcultural collective action that ensued offers an important opportunity to observe how economic survival strategies and forms of collective action are currently being shaped by the narratives around crisis, security and legality that epitomise the functioning of Fortress Europe.

Using ethnographic data gathered alongside the market vendors over the course of this struggle, this paper will examine how the Via Bologna street vendors took on, reformulated and transformed narratives about crisis in Naples and globally in order to protect the possibilities for work that they had carved out for themselves. It will chart the emergence of particular sorts of dialogical 'speech genre' (Bakhtin 1981[1975], 1984[1965], 1986); or typical statements produced by vendors struggling to find a way to keep their market stalls open. This politics of local solidarity was, by necessity, multilingual and multicultural as well as being fraught with ambivalent multiaccentualities and crossed purposes. As part of the attempt to resist what Roediger and Esch (2014) have termed 'race management', offering out market spaces and opportunities for work on a nationally and racially differential basis, it finds that an ambiguous, Gramscian-inspired, transcultural 'local-popular' emerged amongst the Via Bologna street vendors that was capable of speaking back to power. The paper argues that their use and adaptation of anti-hegemonic talk,

and their efforts to translate this across cultural divides, invites a Bakhtinian (1981[1975], 1984[1965], 1986) reading of language – and particularly, as Glissant (1981, 1997) has argued, multilingual linguistic exchange – as key to understanding social struggle and political transformation. As such, the struggle for Via Bologna offers an opportunity to think about the relations of force that can emerge amongst people subjected to unequal and differential legal and economic statuses – people who also speak different languages, follow different religions, and have different political visions and group interests – but find themselves attempting to transcend these differences and work together to survive.

This paper contributes to a body of work about diversity, economic activity and urban life in Naples and across the world which focuses on the connections between economic transactions, transcultural interaction and a wider anti-immigration politics (Dines 2002, 2012; Hall 2012, 2013, 2015; Harney 2006; Hiebert, Rath and Vertovec 2015; Sarnelli 2003; Schmoll 2004). It also builds upon the literature about struggle involving migrants and communities of colour in the global North and Global South (Das Gupta 2006; Kim 2013; Ozarow and Croucher 2014; Però 2014; Roediger and Esch 2014; Rosaldo 1994; Spitzer and Piper 2014), by emphasising the importance of transcultural language practices to the organisation of political action. In doing so it aims to speak back against prevalent post-racial discourses (Gilroy 2012; Goldberg 2009; Lentin 2014) that collapse complex transnational social inequalities and episodes of racialized violence into questions of class struggle, poverty and economic entitlement and, as Beck (2013) has also argued, reduce the systemic, global interdependence of precariousness – and resistance against that fate – to intra-national issues of individual life chances. These

discourses – which were reflected in the interactions between Neapolitan and migrant street vendors at Via Bologna market – are globally resonant but also manifest themselves in a particular way at the local level through the idea of Neapolitan friendliness and goodness.

Situating Neapolitan street markets

This paper is based on ethnographic research that was conducted in street markets in Naples over nine months in 2012. Access to these markets was sought through gatekeepers who were involved in antiracism and grassroots community work in the city. Through these activists and cultural mediators I was introduced to a number of Neapolitan and migrant market traders working in different market sites in the streets and squares around Piazza Garibaldi and Naples' main railway station. The data presented in this paper relates to particular events that took place on one of the key research sites, Via Bologna Market. This street market is on a residential road leading off from Piazza Garibaldi and received its trading licence in 1998. The original vendors, mainly first generation Senegalese, Malian, Guinean and Nigerian men and women migrants, were originally given this space on the grounds that they only sell African 'craft' items like wooden sculptures and Wax cloth. As economic conditions have worsened, most stalls have started selling Chinese-made clothing and accessories like a lot of other markets across the city. The market is a multilingual space and many different languages are regularly spoken along the length of Via Bologna. Italian, Neapolitan and Wolof combine with Itsekiri, Pidgin, Bambara and Arabic, to name but a few of the ones I could understand or came to recognize as the research went on.

Research was also conducted at Poggioreale market, where it is possible to buy Italian-made leather items, and on unlicensed stalls where vendors sell fake designer and Chinese-manufactured goods from sheets spread out on the pavement. The fieldwork primarily took place at different stalls during market opening hours. However, a number of the vendors were also involved in social movements such as the Precari BROS (who mobilise on behalf of the unemployed and underemployed), migrant groups such as Naples' Senegalese Association, and antiracist groups like A3f or Garibaldi 101, so I also attended community events and protests organized by these groups alongside my research participants. These different movements were separate and involved racially and nationally distinct groups of people, although the antiracist groups did work to build intercultural activism and solidarity. However this changed when Naples City Hall closed down Via Bologna market in March 2012.

There have been numerous attempts to expel migrant and Neapolitan street vendors from Piazza Garibaldi since the 1990s. In 2012 a shopping mall and metro station was being built around the city's main railway station in front of Piazza Garibaldi as part of a long-term regeneration project that had launched in 2000. As part of this, in August 2011, the new City Administration headed by Major Luigi de Magistris evicted twenty Neapolitan vendors from their spots on the pavement around the edge of the piazza in order to make the area more appealing to tourists. These evicted vendors refused to move to the alternative spots assigned to them and some of them were setting up informally on Via Bologna when I started the research in January 2012. The official plan was to integrate them into a rejuvenated and redeveloped Via Bologna market which was to be called 'Napoliamo Road' (Zagaria 2011). However, instead of a redevelopment, Via Bologna market vendors,

both Neapolitan and migrant, were accused of selling contraband and failing to pay taxes and license fees, and City Hall temporarily closed down the market. Major De Magistris, who had widespread support in the city's anti-racist scene because of his claimed anti-racist and anti-capitalist politics, was accused of sacrificing his professed pro-migrant solidarity in pursuit of a punishing ideology of legality, law and order that was being pushed for by the centrist members of his administration (Chetta 2012; Cervasio 2012; Sannino 2012)[ii].

Public discourses about Naples present it as a city that is welcoming to migrants. However, the urban regeneration projects that have been launched there since the early 1990s reveal racialized associations made between urban decline, criminality and the presence of migrants (Dines 2012: 190-4). In Italy the configuration of migrant arrivals as a problem – in the media and in legislation – started in the 1990s. Migrants started to be described in terms of an emergent technical language that denoted their legal status (such as *clandestino* – undocumented migrant) which was racialized and connected migration with a whole host of social problems, in particular criminality (Colombo and Sciortino 2004: 102-13). As Dines has noted, such apparently neutral terminology made it possible to circumvent shameful accusations of racism whilst still establishing the otherness of migrants (2012: 2013-4). However, as Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop have shown, the treatment of migrants – and migrant men in particular – is reflective of ideological constructions of race that connect back to Italian colonial projects and American popular culture (Giuliani 2013; Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop 2013). The history of these connections are subject to a widespread amnesia in Italy, often veiled by the myth of *Italiani brava gente* (the good Italian), whereby Italians are claimed to be

naturally friendly to migrants. In the case of Southern Italians this is supposed to be particularly true because they have suffered their own history of mass emigration and prejudice (Dines 2012: 193, 202). At the same time, racially motivated events are often explained away as competition over work and housing, or a 'natural' xenophobia towards newcomers (Curcio and Mellino 2010)[iii]. These interconnected processes of erasure, denial and relativized experiences make it possible to continue perpetrating racialized violence under the guise of guaranteeing security or order, and inform the particularity of post-racial claims in the Italian context.

Towards a multilingual urban ethnography

As the research progressed, it became clear that paying attention to the transcultural talk of my research participants enabled an understanding of wider social, economic and political struggles around difference, positionality and belonging in Naples and globally (Dawes 2016). Street markets are a significant site at which to capture such meaning-making processes because of their multilingual diversity, the independent nature of the profession, and the visible use made of public space by both migrants and locals there. They make obvious the growing ethnic diversity in the city and brings migrants into contact with Neapolitan street vendors and members of the public as part of an ambiguously horizontal everyday transcultural dynamic.

Participant observation was the principle method used during fieldwork and, when possible, a recording device allowed me to note down the exact wording of what was being said. The data was analysed dialogically by paying attention to the way in which particular types of talk – like swearing, greeting, code-switching – were significant to my participant's everyday negotiations of difference, entitlement and

belonging. Out of this emerged a number of 'speech genres' (Bakhtin 1984[1965], 1986), or patterns of communication, which were related to a wider terrain of economic, political and cultural struggle. Part of the research attended to the street markets studied as sites of money-making. Discourses around markets as disorderly were placed in conversation with the multilingual and transcultural market cries through which economic transactions took place. The intimate and frequently violent nature of this everyday sociality was also attended to through an examination of the kinds of banter and catcalling that buttressed local masculinities and enforced boundaries between men and women as well as migrants and Neapolitans. Another important finding from the research concerned the ways in which talk about talking in multiple languages provided a context within which people could reflect upon the experience of difference and hierarchies of belonging (Dawes 2016). When the everyday social processes of the market were interrupted by City Hall's eviction attempt, multilingual language practices provided a key optic through which to understand the organisation of collective struggle.

The key findings of this project contribute to a wider literature on multi-ethnic, urban, economic encounters in Naples and globally. This scholarly work notes the importance of multilingual communication in everyday economic transactions and sociability in cities, something that is centralised and explored in greater ethnographic depth in this project. Hiebert, Rath and Vertovec (2015) have published an agenda for researching urban markets and diversity which connects closely with the ethnography conducted in Neapolitan street markets for this project. They argue that the everyday, ordinary and public transactions that take place in diverse and polyglot urban street markets reveal fundamental connections

between economy and society, and connect local processes of inclusion and exclusion to national and international politics on migration and the economy. Hall's work on the economic and cultural lives of Rye Lane and Walworth Road in South London (2012, 2013, 2015) also argues for the significance of the 'intercultural proficiencies' (2015: 22) that underpin everyday sociability and economic collaborations between people from over twenty countries of origin, a third of whom (in Rye Lane) can speak four languages or more. This economic and cultural diversity is placed within the context of a national and international anti-immigration politics that limits her participants' rights and possibilities. In addition, urban regeneration projects are shown to exclude the people involved in such economic activities from the administrative vision for urban change.

The research also builds upon, and draws insights from, ethnographic work about urban multiculture, everyday transcultural interactions and economic activities in Naples (Dines 2002; Harney 2006; Sarnelli 2003; Schmoll 2003). Schmoll's work (2003) examines in depth the transcultural collaboration that underpins retail activities in the city as part of a pragmatic, everyday cosmopolitanism whereby people have learnt to negotiate encounters with difference in order to facilitate trade and economic activity. Dines' writing on urban planning processes around Piazza Garibaldi from the 1990s (2002; 2012) emphasises the coherent spatial organisation and forms of transcultural solidarity in the piazza, belying its depiction as a chaotic bazaar. He notes the multilingual nature of economic transactions and everyday sociality, as well as remarking on Piazza Garibaldi's appropriation as a principle site of protest for both migrants and unemployed Neapolitans (2002: 184; 2012: 2019). Sarnelli (2003) describes the use

of obscenities and mimicry between Neapolitan and Senegalese traders in Neapolitan markets as a revelatory of ambivalent, everyday encounters with difference. Harney (2006) examines the ways that rumours about Naples' informal economy have spread from mouth to mouth amongst migrating Bangladeshi men to position the city within their migratory journeys. This body of work highlights the ambiguous and fraught nature of everyday transcultural interaction in Neapolitan street markets, which takes place against a backdrop of legal restrictions and administrative crackdowns.

This paper also focuses on the spaces within which, and reasons why, transcultural interactions become politically significant. This contributes to the wider literature on social movements which emphasises the transformative perspective of people of colour, migrants and workers from the global south – where a situation of historic and on-going economic difficulty reconfigures our common-sense understandings of living with crisis (Spitzer and Piper 2014; Ozarow and Croucher 2014); emphasises the intertwined importance of race, class, gender, legal status and language to the organisation of struggle (Das Gupta 2006; Kim 2014; Rosaldo 1994); and centralises the importance of migrants as political actors working and struggling alongside the sedentary population (Però 2014). Roediger and Esch's work on international labour movements (2014) has started to chart the emergence of social movements that are working explicitly against 'race management', or historical attempts by corporate managers and politicians to divide workers by race and nationality in order to suppress collective action. Central to such struggles – for example, the Minneapolis Hotel Workers strike and Smithfield's Tar Heel North Carolina Plant wildcat strikes – is a pro-migration political stance and multilingual

strategies of organisation that involve providing cover whilst standing alongside those subjected to differential and unequal legal statuses and labour conditions (Bacon 2008; Roediger and Esch 2014: 208-10).

Conceptualising language and struggle

Voloshinov and Bakhtin's writings about language suggest ways in which the collective material condition of the utterance is connected to and negotiated within society's larger ideological superstructure[iv]. This provides a first useful indication of how to connect transcultural language use to questions of material struggle in Naples. Voloshinov states, in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, that the utterance is, 'the most sensitive index of social changes' that are 'not as yet accommodated into already regularised and fully defined ideological systems' (1986[1929]: 15-9). The role of the utterance in social change is affected by having to pass through intersecting and different social interests which gives it an ambiguous 'multiaccentuality' in moments of social struggle (1986[1929]: 20-4). Therefore ideologies are formed as part of a dialogic reasoning so they always have a 'contrary theme of common sense' that challenges the dominant ideology of the time (Billig 2001: 217-20). Bakhtin writes that 'typical situations' and 'typical themes' of speech communities generate their own 'speech genres' as a result of 'particular contacts between the meanings of words and actual concrete reality' (Bakhtin 1986: 61, 87). They play a particularly important role in moments of crisis to provide a 'descriptive frame' that allows subaltern people to 'think, act, and survive' in the face of hegemony (Ries 1997: 51; Smith 2004: 253).

Glissant contributes further to the understanding of intersubjective verbal-ideological processes explored by Bakhtin/Voloshinov by demanding that full

attention is paid to the implications of multilingualism in transcultural interactions. His linguistic principle is moderated by two forms of historically-inflected identity: 'root identity' and 'Relation identity'. He explains that a pulsation towards a monolingual 'root identity' has been intimately linked to the nation-building projects and imperialist endeavours that accompanied the rise of modernity in the West (1981: 551, 1997: 23, 49). However, on the other side of this exists a non-reductive relationship towards difference, a multilingual 'Relation identity', which has also occurred as a result of the various encounters of modernity, and this has allowed for the emergence of transverse, non-hierarchical and non-generalisable cultural configurations' (1997: 144). A multilingual 'Counterpoetics' is key to this understanding of living with multiple forms of difference (1981: 627-8, 1997: 25).

Gramsci's work on the relationship between structure and super-structure, relations of force, and the problem of the national-popular offers further useful guidance in conceptualising the cultural approach to material struggle that Bakhtin, Voloshinov and Glissant point towards through a focus on language. His argument centres on the disconnect between the Italian intellectual class and the popular mass movements below them, resulting in a lacking 'national-popular' capable of bringing about change (2000: 366-7). For Gramsci the solution to this lay in a national class alliance between the Southern Italian peasantry and the Northern industrialised proletariat who would act as the hegemonic force. This would mean overcoming the animosity that had been created between the two groups to bring about an alternative 'national-popular' (Chambers 2008: 8; Gramsci 2010: 54, 118, 141). Gramsci suggests that there are three key moments in the formation of the relations of force that are capable of struggling against a period of crisis: firstly, measurable

relations of social forces in the structure; secondly, the formation of a group's self-aware political consciousness and an understanding that one group's corporate interests can be translated to and also become the interests of another subordinated group at both national and international levels; and thirdly, the introduction of decisive action and military force. It is this second moment that is fundamental in marking the passage from structure to superstructure and is what underlies his argument about the need for collaboration between different groups of people (2000: 201-7). Gramsci's ideas can be applied to the processes at work in a particular place and time (Hall 1986: 417-21, 433-4; Said 1993: 57), and Verdicchio has suggested that Gramsci's idea of alliance could be applied to the indigenous and emerging subalterns in contemporary Italy as a result of globalised markets and globalised movements of people (1997: 162). Thus, when examining the multilingual and transcultural nature of the struggle that took place at Via Bologna market in Naples during my fieldwork, it may also be possible to talk about the emergence of a 'local-popular' that has the potential to speak to other struggles nationally and globally.

Connecting the links between migration, citizenship, precarious work, collective action and multilingual communication – as this paper seeks to do – is also becoming increasingly urgent in a post-racial context where the silencing of race as a *particular* category of domination with its own history and context – often in favour of a focus on poverty, inequality, economic entitlement and class struggle – has led to a collapse in antiracist solidarity and mobilisation whilst racial suffering continues to exist (Gilroy 2012; Goldberg, 2009: 19, 158; Lentin 2011, 2014). This widespread 'racial denial' (Goldberg 2009: 192) holds particular weight in the European racial

context where the emergence of particular racisms is intimately tied to the context of migration and so-called 'migration crisis'; and where the 'political economy' of migration criminalises migrants, removing their rights at the same time as it thins out the rights of European citizens to access work, healthcare and security (2009: 177, 181-3). In Naples, post-racial claims are also mitigated by a discourse about Neapolitan goodness that allows for claims to be made about the mutuality of people's life experiences and denies the insidious effects of racial hierarchies. The treatment of the Neapolitan and migrant vendors in this research is intimately linked; but their collective experience of work and social struggle needs to be examined without, as Gilroy has suggested (2012: 380), reducing analysis to a 'deterministic' and relativistic idea of the relationship between race, class and experiences of injustice.

The struggle for Via Bologna

We join the Via Bologna vendors at a point where the market was still open and the Neapolitan vendors were still setting up their stalls within the street. As this situation gained momentum I was starting to notice the emergence of particular sorts of 'speech genre' (Bakhtin 1981[1975], 1986); or typical statements produced by vendors as they sought a 'descriptive frame' (Ries 1997: 51; Smith 2004: 253) within which to fight to keep their market stalls open. At times this seemed to draw on ideas about Naples being dead or dying as we can see with this following speech made by Gennaro[v], one of the Neapolitan vendors who had lost his spot in Piazza Garibaldi and was trying to get a licence to vend within Via Bologna:

> **Gennaro:** It's just that… I dunno… that Neapolitans say 'Naples is dying!' But it can't die, you know? In the meetings I've had with various councillors I've told

> them, 'look I'm willing to roll my sleeves up, to work, for this city, even in the cold, so that we can rise out of this situation where 'Naples is decadent', 'Naples is dirty', 'no one cleans Naples', 'Naples can't fight back'. 'Let's do this!' I tell them.[vi]

Gennaro's discussion of death and dying is reflective of the city's longstanding cultural rapport with crisis, decline, and the bitter understanding Neapolitans have come to of their own disposability and precariousness. However, this was not an expression of defeat but part of the way in which Gennaro chose to speak back against his own marginalisation.

At other times the vendors rights talk seemed to take inspiration from the language of trade unionism and antiracist politics, which was testament to Piazza Garibaldi's long reputation as a 'working-class piazza' due to the active presence of trade unions and antiracist groups, and its popularity as a place to hold protests (Dines 2012: 183). As Dines has shown, there is a history of antiracist organisations collaborating with Piazza Garibaldi vendors to approach the administration that precedes the events of 2012 (2012: 200). For example, following a positive negotiation meeting between City Councillors and the vendors, Gennaro said to a group of Neapolitan and Senegalese vendors: 'It is proper that the rights of all the historic street vendors around Piazza Garibaldi have been recognized'. In this case, the 'historic street vendors' were both the migrant and Neapolitan vendors, united in the struggle to keep their market spaces. This needs to be understood against a history of City Hall managing street vendors differentially through what Roediger and Esch (2014) have termed 'race management', offering out market spaces and opportunities for work on a nationally and racially differential basis. Gennaro's

celebratory comments reflected a strategy for concerted action that was transcultural and explicitly worked against attempts to divide by race and nationality.

However, at other times the political language of Gennaro and the other Neapolitan vendors also functioned to flatten out the differential power dynamics between the Neapolitans and the migrants. This amounted to a denial of the pernicious effects of racism and a refusal to think about collective struggle as also being about providing cover to people standing alongside you but experiencing a different set of oppressive circumstances. Only a week after the jubilant conversation I have recounted above, it became clear that City Hall were not following through on their promise. Two of the Neapolitan vendors, Gennaro and Alfonso, became suspicious that they were being double-crossed by their African colleagues. They confronted Elage, a Senegalese cultural mediator and activist who was heavily involved in the Via Bologna struggle:

> **Gennaro:** Elage, just tell it to me in Italian because you speak Italian well. I still understand a bit of Italian… What got said last Tuesday? They said that Via Bologna market will stay as it is and there will be the opportunity to re-apply for the spots, but giving priority to those who have been there for all these years. Then, if there are other spots available within Via Bologna, we get priority for those spots.

Elage tried to explain that the situation was more complicated for the African vendors – that they were in this situation because of systematic discrimination over many years and on a number of different levels:

Elage: Look, immigrants… the vendor licence of these vendors here got regularised ten years ago. People buy their vendor licences but are discriminated against still. In this country!

Gennaro: Discrimination? But that's even between us, you get me?

It is interesting that Elage – the left-wing migrant activist – got positioned as having the ear of the city's political elite, expressed through the accusation that he was able to speak Italian. This is one of the ways in which the Neapolitan vendors insisted on presenting the struggle through a lens that relativized the experience of injustice, with a Glissantian linguistic analogy of an authoritative 'vehicular' national language undermining a subaltern, and powerless speaker of 'vernacular' dialect (1997: 118-9, 143). The slippages in Gennaro's speech between 'racial denial' and a call for class-focused politics were made possible by the emergence of post-race discourses that reduce and simplify struggle to reactive modalities (Goldberg 2009: 192). During another conversation with Elage, Gennaro made his position even clearer, shouting at him, 'there's just one race: the political race!'

Tensions continued to rise in the relationship between the Via Bologna vendors and activists and the councillors in City Hall. One day in early March the market was interrupted by the impromptu arrival of a reporter and videographer from an Italian news and current affairs programme called *Striscia la notizia*. The resulting documentary report was published on *Striscia's* YouTube page (Striscia Napoli 2012). Initially the reporter circulated amongst the migrant and Italian vendors at the Piazza Garibaldi end of the market, asking to see vendor licenses and sales receipts. He honed in on two migrant vendors from Guinea-Conakry and Senegal whose interviews made it into the final online video. As the video shows,

both vendors had trouble understanding and responding in Italian to the journalist, and the sound of canned laughter was superimposed over their conversation to highlight this and so provide a moment of racist humour and mockery. A few minutes later the police arrived and parked half way up the market. The team of journalists filmed them as they arrested two Nigerian street vendors found in possession of a few fake DVDs and then they left. In the palpable relief that followed the departure of the journalist and the police I went to see if Elage and my other research participants further up the street were ok. As we talked about the fate of the two Nigerian vendors, we speculated whether the whole thing had been set up. We discussed the claims, also made publically by members of the city's antiracist scene and assessors in City Hall in journalistic interviews, that the Assessor for Legality Giuseppe Narducci and Head of the Municipal Police Luigi Sementa were working against Major de Magistris' stated claim to support the continuation of Via Bologna market by creating and amplifying the moral panic about its existence as a threat to legality and public order (Chetta 2012; Cervasio 2012). The special treatment that was reserved for the city's only 'migrant' market is demonstrative of the ways in which migrant street vendors have historically been produced as a key social problem in Italy. However, Riccardo, a shop-keeper on Via Bologna, told Elage that he should stop doing protests against racism because 'there is no racism'. 'We should protest about these kinds of corruption', he asserted. Instead of recognising the ways in which African vendors were being specifically targeted by the authorities, different hierarchies of oppression, to do with race, legal status and linguistic aptitude, were reduced to a question of the powerful against the powerless.

A couple of weeks after this the police arrived and closed the market down. Elage and Peppe (a representative from the CGIL trade union) arrived on the scene as it was happening and demanded to see an official eviction notice. The police officer they approached responded by asking to see Elage's visa document. Peppe objected and the officer promptly threw him to the ground and dragged him along the pavement. The following day, word got passed round for all the vendors to gather in front of Riccardo's shop. Elage told the assembled vendors that there was going to be a protest in front of City Hall the following morning. He spoke first in Wolof and then in Italian, asking them to make sure they were on time and to bring their children. The group of vendors that crowded round Elage to seek guidance were Senegalese, Guinean, Nigerian Egyptian and Italian. They were Italian nationals, documented migrants and undocumented migrants with little hope of regularising their status. The practical decision to communicate in two languages marked a turning point in the nature of the struggle. Not only was it clearly time for direct, organized political action to be taken but this action had to be collective and would take the form of a multilingual 'Counterpoetic' (Glissant 1981: 627-8, 1997: 25). They would have to speak together, and on each other's behalf, despite their different racial, classed and national statuses and despite the difficulties of communication. The next day the vendors were given placards to hold which had been made by members of the antiracist scene, also in attendance. They took turns with the megaphone to shout at the vacant windows of City Hall. One Neapolitan vendor expressed his solidarity with his 'migrant brothers' and a Nigerian vendor appealed for the market to be re-opened so she could feed her family. Then Elage convinced

Elijah, the eleven-year-old son of one of the Nigerian vendors to say a few words. Elijah decided to address De Magistris directly:

> **Elijah:** 'come down here and face us. Because of you my mum can't buy food. I was born in this country but I don't feel welcome here. We look different but we are all equal!'

Many people started crying, and an unknown Neapolitan bystander grabbed Elijah and kissed him on the head. I went over to him to ask him if he knew the young man or his mum. He told me he had never met them before but was moved by their situation as it mirrored his own. He was a member of the Precari BROS and told me that since his unemployment benefits had been cut he no longer knew how to feed his family. He told me that the previous month he had come to City Hall and tried to set fire to himself in protest.

The demonstration crystallised many of the intersecting social interests and experiences of disenfranchised people in Naples. The kinds of spontaneous transcultural solidarity that emerged that day refused attempts to divide by race or nationality in the discovery of a common struggle; but without completely doing away with the differences in power between them. The vendors' protest, and particularly Elijah's furious address, appeared in all the major news outlets the following day. An unattributed quote from a member of the city's antiracist network accused the major of racism and migrant scapegoating:

> 'We believe that the democratic city should offer an immediate response regarding these interventions which are heavily redolent of racism, on the responsibilities of the Head of the Municipal Police Luigia Sementa, of the assessor for legality Giuseppe Narducci, and also of Major de Magistris who

> should clarify with facts whether he really wants to show openness and solidarity towards migrant citizens or if he hopes to continue hiding behind the arrogant faces and truncheons of some of his employees' (Chetta 2012)

Major de Magistris took to twitter that day to say he was offended by this accusation. However, in an interview given during this period, de Magistris is quoted as saying, 'I am a tolerant person, but it is intolerable to see the pavements of Via Caracciolo [a pedestrianised boulevard along the seafront popular with tourists and locals] occupied by all those goods' (Sannino 2012). This statement reveals much about the ambiguity of de Magistris' position, as avowedly pro-migrant and anti-racist but also serving a logic of security and order which would displace, even with violence, what are seen as unruly public displays in order to encourage tourist wealth. On this occasion, the council waited until 2 April 2012 to announce that the market would re-open as a temporary fair, free of charge, until everyone's documentation had been checked and the market could re-open on a regular basis.

Conclusion

The Via Bologna vendors were bound together by an instability of means and opportunity that is fast becoming the norm in both Global North and Global South. However, they were not just positioned by their economic or class status but also internally stratified by racialized hierarchies, language, religion, political vision and legal status. Although migrant and Neapolitan vendors were pitted against each other in the struggle for diminishing market spaces, the events they collectively experienced at that time also worked to bring them together and forge a Gramscian-inspired transcultural 'local-popular' capable of appropriating and rehabilitating a wider narrative about crisis, the economy and migration and using it to speak back

to power. Their use and adaptation of anti-hegemonic talk, and their efforts to translate this across cultural and linguistic divides, speaks to both Bakhtin and Voloshinov's arguments about language and social change, as well as to Glissant's assertion that multilingualism is central to political transformation in a world that has been devastated by racial violence and division. Clearly this was not a simple activity but the product of compromise and forbearance, where genuine reciprocity, collaborative performances, rubbing alongside, and bitter resentment co-existed uncomfortably together. Their politics of local solidarity was, by necessity, multilingual and multicultural in ways that were both transformative of social relations and, at the same time, deeply ambivalent.

The events at Via Bologna should be seen as a provisional victory. Vendors are still struggling to work and competing for ever-diminishing market space in Naples; and the vendors tell me that the events at Via Bologna have put off potential clients, acting to starve out the market which City Hall has been so far unable to close down definitively. Via Bologna market was subject to another eviction attempt in June 2017, this time ostensibly to make space for an underground carpark for the railway station. Descriptions of the market as a 'souk' and justifications from municipal assessors about tourism, public order, and legality again highlight the racialized nature of discourses around migrants and the neoliberal imperatives placed on the use of public space (Il Mattino, 15 June 2017). As before, the city's social movements sprung into gear in solidarity with the evicted vendors and, as before, the market was successfully re-opened. Mayor de Magistris clarified, 'we always help people who want to integrate themselves into our society and respect our laws' (Il Mattino, 16 June 2017). Whilst the struggle for Via Bologna offers an

insight into the future of subaltern struggle in the age of globalised migration, the scale of the challenge should not be under-estimated. This is a poly-linguistic Europe where linguistic and cultural circuits exist alongside borders, nationalist homogenisation and a 'racial denial' that is in service of neoliberalism (Goldberg 2009: 152-92). The provisional and precarious nature of the vendors' victory reveals the importance of multilingual Relation in the ways that the powerless renegotiate their relationship with power. The success of such a strategy may only be partial but it is also not something that institutions and governments can do much to either encourage or repress. They can no more stop the multilingual babel of late capitalism than they can prevent the actions and movement of people looking for choice and opportunities. The cultural languages of the people signify the power of their collective drive.

[i] The available data on migrant occupations does not reflect the total migration population in Naples and Campania due to the numbers of undocumented and informally employed. However, it would appear that just under half of migrants are employed in the service sector (in particular as carers and domestic help), with 14.5 per cent employed in construction, 12.5 per cent in commerce (including street vending), 10.8 per cent in catering, 9.7 per cent in agriculture and 5 per cent in the food industry (Amato, D'Alessandro and Spagnuolo 2009: 124).

[ii] Mayor de Magistris and his administration were accused of racism and hypocrisy in their treatment of the market vendors around Piazza Garibaldi and Via Bologna. Father Alex Zanotelli stated that, 'It seems that City Hall is ashamed of the vendors', whilst activist Antonio Esposito said that, 'an ideological use is being made of the idea of legality that, deprived of justice, becomes an instrument of violence that serves an ideology of order and security' (Cervasio 2012).

[iii] For example the murder of seven West African men in Castelvolturno (Naples) in 2008 and the shootings of West African migrants working in agriculture in Rosarno (Calabria) in 2010.

[iv] There is some confusion over the authorship of Voloshinov's and Bakhtin's works (Maybin 2001: 64). In so far as both address the voice, dialogue and the ideological nature of language they are treated in this paper as being of the same author, although the two different names will be used when referencing.

[v] All individuals have been anonymised with the exception of local politicians and public officials.

[vi] All quotations from the ethnographic research as well as from media sources have been translated from Neapolitan or Italian by the author.

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